

Lakeland, Florida

EPA to Discuss Pollution with Westgate Residents

Cleanup of toxic wastes will not require emptying the neighborhood.

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By WILL VASH

The Ledger

LAKELAND -- Westgate residents concerned about the health effects of contamination in their neighborhood on Tuesday will hear from government experts on the subject.

IF YOU GO

Environmental Protection Agency officials will discuss an environmental study of the Westgate area 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Lake Hunter Room of The Lakeland Center, 700 W. Lemon St.

The Environmental Protection Agency will discuss its environmental study, which found high concentrations of arsenic, lead and the pesticide toxaphene in a ditch in the area, and answer residents' questions on the subject at The Lakeland Center, 700

W. Lemon St.

The community meeting will be from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the Lake Hunter Room. Presentations of the study will begin at the top of each hour.

Bill Denman, remedial project manager with the EPA Superfund division, said the agency also will explain a clean-up project that will begin in March.

"We're required to involve the community from the very beginning," Denman said. "Based on what we found, a short-term cleanup needs to take place."

The neighborhood, about a mile from downtown Lakeland, was the site of Landia Chemical Company and Florida Favorite Fertilizers, pesticide and

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fertilizer companies. The most dangerous chemicals were found on the company sites and in the Wayman Street ditch.

The EPA took the soil and water samples from the ditch, the industrial sites and several residences in October 1999.

The most contaminated area of the ditch, about 700 feet long, is only a few hundred feet from the Westgate neighborhood.

Denman said although there is a health risk with prolonged exposure with the water and soil in that area residents did not have to evacuated. Samples from Westgate residences were found to be below EPA contamination standards.

Randy Merchant, environmental administrator for the Florida Department of Health's bureau of environmental toxicology, will answer questions at the meeting.

"Nearby residents have a right to be involved in the process," Merchant said.

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